

# Stunning surroundings envelop 'Night Music'

By HELEN ZUCKER

## Review

The St. Dunstan's Theatre Guild production of Stephen Sondheim's "A Little Night Music" at the Cranbrook Greek Theatre is beautifully mounted.

Jo Wolfe and the set decoration and construction crew are to be congratulated. They have made the most of what can only be described as magnificent surroundings.

No mention is made of Ingmar Bergman's screenplay, "Smiles of a Summer Night," in the program notes. I found this puzzling since Sondheim's play is an adaptation.

The film, a classic since it appeared in the '30s, is probably available in film libraries at Wayne State University, Oakland University and the Detroit Film Institute. The entire cast

of "Night Music" could have benefited from exposure to the original conception.

**DONNA RYDER** AS Desiree Armfeldt is an experienced acry, but she isn't Desiree. Her perky American soul simply doesn't come across as the soul of a Desiree.

Joseph Dabbs is likeable as lawyer Fredrik Egerman, but it's difficult to believe that this bouncy gentleman is searching for his "lost youth." Except for sitting on a bed without moving

during nearly the whole of a long number, Dabbs springs about the stage, a hale and hearty fellow.

He is never in the dumps, but Fredrik Egerman is a man in a stupor of loss and frustration until the end of the play.

Steve Denigate is engaging as young Henrik. I am sure that with helpful direction and quicker timing his one good song, "Later," the outcry of youth perpetually being told to wait for everything it wants now—could have been captivating.

He wanders through the production, a character in search of a director. He has a nice quality that needs bringing out.

**SARAH BURLEIGH** as the virgin wife, Anne Egerman, is fresh, willful, sprightly, bratty, but there isn't a

nuance, an edge of awareness of anything beyond the surface of her role. Like the rest of the cast, she doesn't seem to have a grasp of the person she is playing. A virgin wife is a slightly frightened person, no matter how kind her elderly husband may be.

Fran Hayes as Madame Armfeldt, the great old courtesan, now retired on her booty, is believable and moving. She has patrician airs; a wonderful, deep, ironic voice, and she makes the most of her good lines.

Ms. Hayes is the only actress in the production with any conception of what a grant, aristocratic Swede, Bergman-style, might be. Good direction could have deepened, expanded this role into the magical quality it has in the original.

Joanne Weston as Countess Charlotte Malin is lively and seems to be having great fun. As the miserably jealous wife of the pigheaded, philandering Count Malcolm, it's hard to understand her good humor, her expressive face. She should be reserved, proud, coiled in an agony of tension. But there isn't a tense bone in Ms. Weston's body.

Joel Ebersole as the philandering Count Carl Gustav Malin, has obviously sung before; his voice is one of the few to carry through the night air. But he simply isn't a young, dashing dragon who drives women insane.

**JIM BROOKS** as Frid, Madame Armfeldt's servant, seems to be made of wood. He comes to life in the last act, making love to Petra, Anne's maid. Like the rest of the production,

he's as American as apple pie. Frid should be a discreet, complicated, Swedish man-servant, valet to a great lady.

Judy Cochill as Petra, the maid, is the only member of the cast to pull off a show stopper. Ms. Cochill redeems the evening for, alas, too brief a time. In her one rousing number, "The Miller's Son," the stage comes alive, the audience wakes up, talent shines. The Liebeslieder Singers, the chorus, a mixed bag of Swedish genies, played by Larry Finn, Carole Maloff, Carolyn Racioppi, Fran Loud, Jim Leese and Margie Brooks are, in fact, a mixed bag of trained and untrained voices. Together, they manage to sing off key through the entire performance.

The show runs through Saturday.

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